

Common Loon Family at LLCC

By Chris Hagen, LLCC Food Service Coordinator

With fall in the air and school back in session, it's time to tell you about the excitement on Long Lake this past spring and summer.

Four days after the ice went off the lake, on April 23rd, two adult Loons arrived at Long Lake. Staff talked about the disappearance of the young loonlets last year and started talking about putting a nesting platform out on the lake for them this year.

Dave Conway, LLCC's Maintenance Coordinator, with design plans provided by the naturalists, went to work on constructing a platform with the proper dimensions and webbing. Within a few days the platform was ready. On April 26th, it snowed and sleeted and the weather kept the staff from getting the platform out on the lake. Staff members were unsure if they could get the platform out before the female loon laid her eggs on shore or on another lake. Finally, on May 3rd, Jessie and Brian, two of LLCC's Seasonal Naturalists, were able to get the platform out on the lake. They took it out to the far end of the lake, just off the end of the peninsula. Five days later, the loons were checking it out.

On May 9th, nesting material was being built on the platform by both adult loons; they were using it! With everyone keeping a close eye on the activity around the platform, on May 22nd, the loons were sitting on the nest, hopefully, on a couple of eggs.

Twenty-nine days later, the question was answered; The adult loons came out for a swim with two small loonlets on one of their backs. Every day staff members checked to see if the loonlets were still with us as it was not uncommon for other wildlife to make a meal of young birds and smaller animals in the area.

By the middle of July, the parents had the two young loonlets on the beach in front of the office, teaching them to dive for their own food. One loonlet took to it quite readily, but the other was quite a bit more skeptical about diving; however, he finally came around and started to dive as well.

From that point, they started growing very fast, losing their gray downy fuzz and turning black. They began swimming on their own, far distances from their parents and diving for their own food. On August 12th, staff noticed that the parents were now trying to teach the young loonlets to fly. The juveniles are now nearly as big as their parents but brown in color. The parents begin to leave the loonlets alone on the lake as they flew off to the other 3 lakes in the area to socialize with other loons. The sounds of these social gatherings were evident of the activity.

Finally, on August 26th, all four birds were taking flight at the same time: Adult, loonlet, adult, loonlet... what a sight to see! From this time on, until the 8th of September, the loons and loonlets would come and go between the 3 lakes. The Long Lake staff is feeling very fortunate to have had the pair nest and raise their young on Long Lake the very first year the platform was in place.

With September's arrival and fall setting in, the family began to leave for the southern climate. Starting with the parents, and followed by the loonlets, one at a time, by mid-October, all had left for the south. We all hope that the parents will return in the Spring to start another family. The Loonlets will be gone for about 3 years before they return to the north; hopefully, to their birthplace right here at Long Lake Conservation Center.

(Photos):

